

offered respecting this curious episode in Zola's career. His original acceptance of Laurier's offer was explained by him to Alexis. Those were wild times, and every mind was more or less unhinged. "For my part," said Zola, "I imagined that it was the end of the world, and that there would be no more literature. I had brought the manuscript of the first chapter of 'La Cure'e' with me from Paris, and I occasionally looted at it as I might have looked at some very old papers which had become mere souvenirs. Paris seemed to me very far away, lost in the clouds; and, as I had my wife and mother with me and no certain prospect of money, I ended by thinking it quite natural and advisable that I should plunge into politics, for which I had felt so much contempt previously, — a contempt which speedily returned."¹

There was some little exaggeration in those last words as the sequel will show, though as Zola was a man of absolute convictions, one who detested compromises, it was* only natural that he should look unfavourably on many politicians and their methods. But, whatever his views, it happened that politics repeatedly played an important part in his life, even at the time when he appeared most devoted to purely literary pursuits. It does not seem very difficult

to divine how his career would have shaped
itself had he
become a functionary. As he had too
independent a char-
acter to execute any orders unless he
regarded them as
right, he would soon have found himself at
loggerheads
with his superiors, dismissed or compelled to
resign; and
unlike the majority of the discarded
functionaries of the
period he could hardly have sought
compensation in a

¹ Alexis, *1. c.*, p. 173.